Book 6

The Humanistic Tradition

Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Global Perspective

GLORIA K. FIERO

McGraw Hill Education

Book

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Front cover
Isamu Noguchi, *Cube*, 1968. Steel subframe with aluminum panels, height 28 ft.

Frontispiece and page x
Pablo Picasso, *Seated Woman* (detail), Paris, 1927. Oil on wood, 4 ft. 3⅛ in. × 3 ft. 2¼ in.

Series Contents

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Letter from the Author

The Humanistic Tradition originated more than two decades ago. As a long-time humanities instructor, I recognized that the Western-only perspective was no longer adequate to understanding the cultural foundations of our global world. However, none of the existing humanities textbooks served my needs. The challenge was daunting—covering the history of Western literature, philosophy, art, music, and dance was already an ambitious undertaking for a humanities survey; how could I broaden the scope to include Asia, Africa, and the Americas without over-loading the course?

I found the solution in my classroom: Instead of assuming a strictly historical approach to the past, (as I did in my history classes), I would organize my humanities lectures topically, focusing on universal themes, major styles, and significant movements—gods and rulers, classicism, imperialism, the Romantic hero, racial and sexual equality, globalism—as they reflected or shaped the culture of a given time or place. What evolved was *The Humanistic Tradition*, a thematic, yet global and chronological approach to humanities, one that provokes thought and discussion without burying students under mountains of encyclopedic information.

Now in its seventh edition, *The Humanistic Tradition* continues to celebrate the creative mind by focusing on how the arts and ideas relate to each other, what they tell us about our own human nature and that of others on our planet. Its mission remains relevant to the present, and essential (I would hope) to enriching the future of each student who reads its pages.

The Seventh Edition of *The Humanistic Tradition*

To the seventh edition of *The Humanistic Tradition* I have added a new feature: **Looking Into** is a diagrammatic analysis of key works, such as Neolithic stone circles (including the latest archeological discoveries in Southeast Turkey), the Parthenon, the sonnets of Petrarch and Donne, *Shiva: Lord of the Dance*, Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Double Portrait*, and Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*.

The new edition expands two popular features that promote critical thinking: **Exploring Issues**, which focuses on controversial ideas and current debates (such as the battle over the ownership of antiquities, and creationism versus evolution); and **Making Connections**, which brings attention to contrasts and continuities between past and present. To **Exploring Issues**, I have added the debate over the origins of India's Vedic culture (chapter 3). To **Making Connections** I offer a novel illustration of the contemporary affection for Chinese landscape painting (chapter 14).

The chapter-by-chapter integration of literary, visual, and aural primary sources remains a hallmark of *The Humanistic Tradition*. In an effort to provide the most engaging and accessible literary works, some selected readings in this edition appear in alternate translations. **Marginal logos** have been added to direct students to additional literary resources that are discussed but not included in the text itself.

Additions to the art program include the Nebra Sky Disk, Hellenistic mosaics, Delacroix's *Women of Algiers*, Oceania's art of tattoo, Japan's Amida Buddha, Charles Willson Peale's *Portrait of Yarrow Mamout* (the earliest known portrait of a Muslim in America), Ai Wei Wei's *Forever Bicycle*, Ernesto Neto's *Anthropodino*, and Zaha Hadid's Heydar Aliyev Center. Chapters 37 and 38, which treat the Information Age and Globalism, have been updated to present a cogent overview of contemporary issues, including terrorism, ecological concerns, ethnic conflict, and the digital arts.

The Humanistic Tradition pioneered a flexible six-book format in recognition of the varying chronological range of humanities courses. Each slim volume was also convenient for students to bring to classes, the library, and other study areas. The seventh edition continues to be available in this six-book format, as well as in a two-volume set for the most common two-term course configuration.

In preparing the seventh edition, I have depended on the excellent editorial and production team led by Donald Dinwiddie at Laurence King Publishing. Special thanks also go to Kara Hattersley-Smith at LKP and Sarah Remington at McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Gloria K. Fiero

The Humanistic Tradition—a personalized learning

Each generation leaves a creative legacy, the sum of its ideas and achievements. This legacy represents the response to our effort to ensure our individual and collective survival, our need to establish ways of living in harmony with others, and our desire to understand our place in the universe. Meeting the challenges of *survival, communality,* and *self-knowledge,* we have created and transmitted the tools of science and technology, social and political institutions, religious and philosophic systems, and various forms of personal expression—the totality of which we call **culture**. Handed down from generation to generation, this legacy constitutes the humanistic tradition, the study of which is called *humanities.*

Understanding that a global humanities course is taught in varying ways, Gloria Fiero redefines the discipline for greater flexibility via a variety of innovative digital tools. Enhanced by McGraw-Hill Education's LearnSmart and SmartBook, Fiero delivers a learning experience tailored to the needs of each institution, instructor, and student. With the ability to incorporate new extended readings, streaming music, and artwork, *The Humanistic Tradition* renews the understanding of the relationship between world cultures and humankind's creative legacy.

Personalized Learning Experience

In **Connect Humanities**, you can access all of the art and music from *The Humanistic Tradition* on your computer or mobile device. Music logos (right) that appear in the margins of the text refer to listening selections available for streaming.

As part of McGraw-Hill Education's Connect Humanities, LearnSmart is an adaptive learning program designed to personalize the learning experience. LearnSmart helps students learn faster, study smarter, and retain more knowledge for greater success. Distinguishing what students know from what they don't, and touching on concepts they are most likely to forget, LearnSmart continuously adapts to each students' needs by building a personalized learning path. LearnSmart is proven to strengthen memory recall, keep students in class, and boost grades. By helping students master core concepts ahead of time, LearnSmart enables instructors to spend more meaningful time in the classroom.

Enhanced by LearnSmart, SmartBook is the first and only adaptive reading experience currently available.

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and teaching experience in global humanities

Personalized Teaching Experience

Personalize and tailor your teaching experience to the needs of your humanities course with Create, Insight, and instructor resources.

Create What You've Only Imagined

No two humanities courses are the same. That is why Gloria Fiero has personally hand-picked additional readings that can be added easily to a customized edition of *The Humanistic Tradition*. Marginal icons (right) that appear throughout this new edition indicate additional readings, a list of which is found at the end of the Table of Contents.

To customize your book using McGraw-Hill Create™, follow these steps:
1. Go to http://create.mheducation.com and sign in or register for an instructor account.
2. Click Collections (top, right) and select the "Traditions: Humanities Readings Through the Ages" Collection to preview and select readings. You can also make use of McGraw-Hill's comprehensive, cross-disciplinary content as well as other third-party resources.
3. Choose the readings that are most relevant to your students, your curriculum, and your own areas of interest.
4. Arrange the content in a way that makes the most sense for your course.
5. Personalize your book with your course information and choose the best format for your students—color, black-and-white, or ebook. When you are done, you will receive a free PDF review copy in just minutes.

Or contact your McGraw-Hill Education representative, who can help you build your unique version of *The Humanisitic Tradition*.

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The first and only analytics tool of its kind, Connect Insight is a series of visual data displays—each framed by an intuitive question—that provide at-a-glance information regarding how your class is doing.
- **Intuitive** You receive an instant, at-a-glance view of student performance matched with student activity.
- **Dynamic** Connect Insight puts real-time analytics in your hands so you can take action early and keep struggling students from falling behind.
- **Mobile** Connect Insight travels from office to classroom, available on demand wherever and whenever it's needed.

Instructor Resources

Connect Image Bank is an instructor database of images from select McGraw-Hill Education art and humanities titles, including *The Humanistic Tradition*. It includes all images for which McGraw-Hill has secured electronic permissions. With Connect Image Bank, instructors can access a text's images by browsing its chapters, style/period, medium, and culture, or by searching with key terms. Images can be easily downloaded for use in presentations and in PowerPoints. The download includes a text file with image captions and information. You can access Connect Image Bank on the library tab in Connect Humanities (http://connect.mheducation.com).

Various instructor resources are available for *The Humanistic Tradition*. These include an instructor's manual with discussion suggestions and study questions, music listening guides, lecture PowerPoints, and a test bank. Contact your McGraw-Hill sales representative for access to these materials.

Studying humanities engages us in a dialogue with primary sources: works original to the age in which they were produced. Whether literary, visual, or aural, a primary source is a text; the time, place, and circumstances in which it was created constitute the context; and its various underlying meanings provide the subtext. Studying humanities from the perspective of text, context, and subtext helps us understand our cultural legacy and our place in the larger world.

Text

The *text* of a primary source refers to its medium (that is, what it is made of), its form (its outward shape), and its content (the subject it describes).

Literature: Literary form varies according to the manner in which words are arranged. So, *poetry*, which shares rhythmic organization with music and dance, is distinguished from *prose*, which normally lacks regular rhythmic patterns. Poetry, by its freedom from conventional grammar, provides unique opportunities for the expression of intense emotions. Prose usually functions to convey information, to narrate, and to describe.

Philosophy (the search for truth through reasoned analysis) and *history* (the record of the past) make use of prose to analyze and communicate ideas and information.

In literature, as in most forms of expression, content and form are usually interrelated. The subject matter or form of a literary work determines its *genre*. For instance, a long narrative poem recounting the adventures of a hero constitutes an *epic*, while a formal, dignified speech in praise of a person or thing constitutes a *eulogy*.

The Visual Arts: The visual arts employ a wide variety of media, ranging from the traditional colored pigments used in painting, to wood, clay, marble, and (more recently) plastic and neon used in sculpture, to a wide variety of digital media, including photography and film. The form or outward shape of a work of art depends on the manner in which the artist manipulates the elements of color, line, texture, and space. Unlike words, these formal elements lack denotative meaning.

The visual arts are dominantly spatial, that is, they operate and are apprehended in space. Artists manipulate form to describe or interpret the visible world (as in the genres of portraiture and landscape), or to create worlds of fantasy and imagination. They may also fabricate texts that are nonrepresentational, that is, without identifiable subject matter.

Music and Dance: The medium of music is sound. Like literature, music is durational: it unfolds over the period of time in which it occurs. The major elements of music are melody, rhythm, harmony, and tone color—formal elements that also characterize the oral life of literature. However, while literary and visual texts are usually descriptive, music is almost always nonrepresentational: it rarely has meaning beyond sound itself. For that reason, music is the most difficult of the arts to describe in words.

Dance, the artform that makes the human body itself the medium of expression, resembles music in that it is temporal and performance-oriented. Like music, dance exploits rhythm as a formal tool, and like painting and sculpture, it unfolds in space as well as in time.

Studying the text, we discover the ways in which the artist manipulates medium and form to achieve a characteristic manner of execution or expression that we call *style*. Comparing the styles of various texts from a single era, we discover that they usually share certain defining features and characteristics. Similarities between, for instance, ancient Greek temples and Greek tragedies, or between Chinese lyric poems and landscape paintings, reveal the unifying moral and aesthetic values of their respective cultures.

Context

The *context* describes the historical and cultural environment of a text. Understanding the relationship between text and context is one of the principal concerns of any inquiry into the humanistic tradition. To determine the context, we ask: In what time and place did our primary source originate? How did it function within the society in which it was created? Was it primarily decorative, didactic, magical, or propagandistic? Did it serve the religious or political needs of the community? Sometimes our answers to these questions are mere guesses. For instance, the paintings on the walls of Paleolithic caves were probably not "artworks" in the modern sense of the term, but, rather, magical signs associated with religious rituals performed in the interest of communal survival.

Determining the function of the text often serves to clarify the nature of its form, and vice-versa. For instance, in that the Hebrew Bible, the *Song of Roland*, and many other early literary works were spoken or sung, rather than read, such literature tends to feature repetition and rhyme, devices that facilitate memorization and oral delivery.

Subtext

The *subtext* of a primary source refers to its secondary or implied meanings. The subtext discloses conceptual messages embedded in or implied by the text. The epic poems of the ancient Greeks, for instance, which glorify prowess and physical courage, suggest an exclusively male perception of virtue. The state portraits of the seventeenth-century French king Louis XIV bear the subtext of unassailable and absolute power. In our own time, Andy Warhol's serial adaptations of Coca-Cola bottles offer wry commentary on the commercial mentality of American society. Examining the implicit message of the text helps us determine the values of the age in which it was produced, and offers insights into our own.

"What is real is not the external form, but the essence of things."
Constantin Brancusi
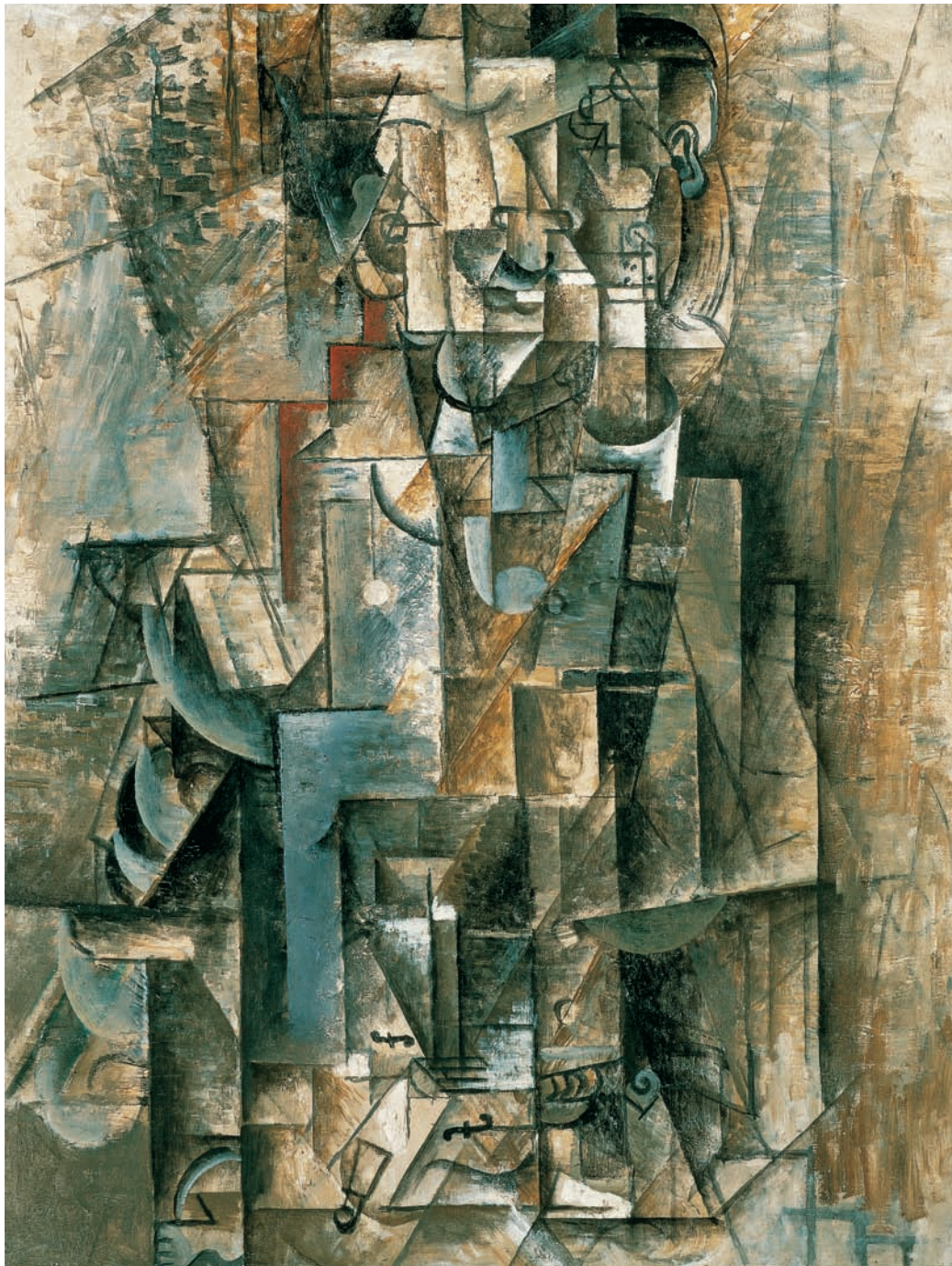
Figure 32.1 PABLO PICASSO, *Man with a Violin*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 3 ft. 3½ in. × 2 ft. 5⅞ in. Knit by a lively arrangement of flat shaded planes, monochromatic in color, figure and ground are almost indistinguishable in this Cubist canvas. Representational elements—the man and the violin—are evident in only bits and pieces abstracted from the whole.

Since the birth of civilization, no age has broken with tradition more radically or more self-consciously than the twentieth century. In its first decades, the spirit and the style of this new direction came to be called "Modernism." Modernism rejected former cultural values and conventions in favor of innovation, experimentation, and (at its most extreme) anarchy, the absolute dissolution of established norms.

The Modernist revolution in the creative arts responded to equally revolutionary changes in science and technology. The transformation in technology began at the end of the nineteenth century with the invention of the telephone (1876), wireless telegraphy (1891), and the internal combustion engine (1892), which made possible the first gasoline-powered automobiles. In France and the United States, the mass production of automobiles was underway by 1900. Among the swelling populations of modern cities, the pace of living became faster than ever before. By 1903, the airplane joined the string of enterprises that ushered in an era of rapid travel and communication—a "shrinking" of the planet that would produce the "global village" of the late twentieth century. Advances in scientific theory proved equally significant: atomic physics, which provided a new understanding of the physical universe, was as momentous for the twentieth century as metallurgy was for the fourth millennium B.C.E. But while the latter contributed to the birth of civilization, the former, which ushered in the nuclear age, threatened its survival.

The modern era—roughly the first half of the twentieth century—is considered thematically in the next three chapters. The first, chapter 32, deals with the Modernist assault on tradition in the arts. Chapter 33 examines the shaping influence of the great Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, whose writings had a shattering effect on every form of cultural expression. Chapter 34 considers the brutal impact of totalitarianism and the two world wars that put the potentially liberating tools of the new science and technology to horrifically destructive ends.

The New Physics

At the turn of the twentieth century, atomic physicists advanced a model of the universe that challenged the one Isaac Newton had provided two centuries earlier. Newton's universe operated according to smoothly functioning laws that generally corresponded with the world of sense perception. Modern physicists found, however, that at the physical extremes of nature—the microcosmic (the very small or very fast) realm of atomic particles and the macrocosmic world of heavy astronomical bodies—the laws of Newton's *Principia* did not apply. A more comprehensive model of the universe began to emerge after 1880 when two American physicists, Albert Michelson and Edward Morley, determined that the speed of light is a universal constant. In 1897, the English physicist Joseph J. Thompson (1846–1940) identified the electron, the elementary subatomic particle whose interaction between atoms is the main cause of chemical bonding. Three years later, the German physicist Max Planck (1858–1947) suggested that light waves sometimes behaved as *quanta*, that is, as separate and discontinuous bundles of energy.

Alongside this and other groundbreaking work in *quantum physics* (as the field came to be called), yet another German physicist, Albert Einstein (1879–1955), made public his *special theory of relativity* (1905), a radically new approach to the new concepts of time, space, motion, and light. While Newton had held that objects preserved properties such as mass and length whether at rest or in motion, Einstein theorized that as an object's speed approached the speed of light, its mass increased and its length contracted; no object could move faster than light, and light did not require any medium to carry it. In essence, Einstein's theory held that all measurable motion is relative to some other object, and that no universal coordinates, and no hypothetical ether, exist.

Building on Einstein's theories, Werner Heisenberg (1901–1976) theorized that since the very act of measuring subatomic phenomena altered them, the position and the velocity of a subatomic particle could not be measured simultaneously with absolute accuracy. Heisenberg's *principle of uncertainty* (1927)—the more precisely the position of a particle is determined, the less precisely its momentum can be known—replaced the absolute and rationalist model of the universe with one whose exact mechanisms at the subatomic level are indeterminate.

Science and Technology

1900	Max Planck (German) announces his quantum theory
1903	Henry Ford (American) introduces the Model A automobile
1905	Albert Einstein (German) announces his special theory of relativity
1910	Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead (British) publish their *Principia Mathematica*, a systematic effort to base mathematics in logic
1913	Niels Bohr (Danish) applies quantum theory to atomic structure
1916	Einstein announces his general theory of relativity

Quantum physics gave humankind greater insight into the workings of the universe, but it also made the operation of that universe more remote from the average person's understanding. The basic components of nature—subatomic particles—were inaccessible to both the human eye and the camera, hence beyond the realm of the senses. Nevertheless, the practical implications of the new physics were immense: radar technology, computers, and consumer electronics were only three of its numerous long-range consequences. Atomic fission, the splitting of atomic particles (begun only after 1920), and the atomic bomb itself (first tested in 1945) confirmed the validity of Einstein's famous formula, $E=mc^2$, which shows that mass and energy are different manifestations of the same thing; and therefore (in his words), "a very small amount of mass [matter] can be converted into a very large amount of energy." The new physics paved the way for the atomic age. It also radically altered the way in which human beings understood the physical world.

Early Twentieth-Century Poetry

Modern poets had little use for the self-indulgent sentiments of the nineteenth-century Romantics and the idealism of the Symbolists. They found in nature neither ecstasy nor redemption. If nature was indeed both random and relative, the job of these poets might be to find a new language for conveying its unique character, one that captured the disjunctive eccentricities of an indifferent cosmos. At the least, they would produce a style that was as conceptual and abstract as modern physics.

The Imagists

The leaders in the search for a more concentrated style of expression were a group of poets who called themselves *Imagists.* For the Imagist, the writer was like a sculptor, whose technique required that he carve away all extraneous matter in a process of **abstraction** that aimed to arrive at an intrinsic or essential form. Verbal compression, formal precision, and economy of expression were the goals of the Imagists. Renouncing traditional verse forms, fixed meter, and rhythm, their style of free verse became notorious for its abrupt and discontinuous juxtaposition of images. Essentially an English-language literary movement, Imagism attracted a number of talented American women, including Amy Lowell (1874–1925) and Hilda Doolittle (1886–1961), who signed her poems simply "H.D."

Imagism's most influential poet was the American expatriate Ezra Pound (1885–1972). By the age of twenty-three, Pound had abandoned his study of language and literature at American universities for a writing career that led him to Europe, where he wandered from England to France and Italy. A poet, critic, and translator, Pound was thoroughly familiar with the literature of his contemporaries, but he cast his net wide: he studied the prose and poetry of ancient Greece and Rome, China and Japan, medieval France and Renaissance Italy—often reading such works in their original language. As a student of East Asian calligraphy, he drew inspiration from the sparseness and subtlety

of Chinese characters. He was particularly fascinated by the fact that the Chinese poetic line, which presented images without grammar or syntax, operated in the same intuitive manner that nature worked upon the human mind. It was this vitality that Pound wished to bring to poetry.

In Chinese and Japanese verse—especially in the Japanese poetic genre known as **haiku** (see chapter 21)—Pound found the key to his search for concentrated expression. Two of his most famous *haiku*-like poems are found in the collection called *Personae.* He claimed that it took him a year and a half to write the first of these poems, cutting down the verse from thirty lines to two.

READING 32.1 From Pound's *Personae* (1926)

"In a Station of the Metro"
The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

"The Bath Tub"
As a bathtub lined with white porcelain,
When the hot water gives out or goes tepid,
So is the slow cooling of our chivalrous passion,
O my much praised but-not-altogether-satisfactory lady.

Q In what ways are these poems abstract?

Q What effects are created by the juxtaposition of the key images?

Pound imitated the *haiku*-style succession of images to evoke subtle, metaphoric relationships between things. He conceived what he called the "rhythmical arrangement of words" to produce an emotional "shape."

In the *Imagist Manifesto* (1913) and in various interviews, Pound outlined the cardinal points of the Imagist doctrine: poets should use "absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation"; and they should employ free verse rhythms "in sequence of the musical phrase." Ultimately, Pound summoned his contemporaries to cast aside traditional modes of Western verse-making and "make it new"—a dictum allegedly scrawled on the bathtub of an ancient Chinese emperor. "Day by day," wrote Pound, "make it new/cut underbrush/pile the logs/keep it growing." The injunction to "make it new" became the rallying cry of Modernism.

The Imagist search for an abstract language of expression stood at the beginning of the Modernist revolution in poetry. It also opened the door to a more concealed and elusive style of poetry, one that drew freely on the cornucopia of world literature and history. The poems that Pound wrote after 1920, particularly the *Cantos* (the unfinished opus on which Pound labored for fifty-five years), are filled with foreign language phrases, obscene jokes, and arcane literary and historical allusions juxtaposed without connective tissue. These poems contrast sharply with the terse precision and eloquent purity of Pound's early Imagist efforts.

T. S. Eliot

No English-speaking poet advanced the Modernist agenda more powerfully than the American-born writer T. S. (Thomas Stearns) Eliot (1888–1965). Meeting Pound in 1914, Eliot joined him in the effort to rid modern poetry of romantic sentiment. He held that poetry must seek the verbal formula or "objective correlative" (as he called it) that gives precise shape to feeling. Eliot's style soon became notable for its inventive rhythms, irregular cadences, and startling images, many of which draw on personal reminiscences and obscure literary resources.

Educated at Harvard University in philosophy and the classics, Eliot was studying at Oxford when World War I broke out. He remained in England after the war, becoming a British citizen in 1927 and converting to the Anglican faith in the same year. His intellectual grasp of modern philosophy, world religions, anthropology, and the classical literature of Asia and the West made him the most erudite literary figure of his time.

Begun in 1910, Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (reproduced here in full) captures the waning idealism that pervaded the years leading up to World War I. The "love song" is actually the dramatic monologue of a timid, middle-aged man who has little faith in himself or his capacity for effective action. Prufrock's cynicism anticipated the disillusion and the sense of impotence that marked the postwar generation (discussed in greater detail in chapter 34).

READING 32.2 Eliot's "The Love Song of
J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915)

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.[1]

Let us go then, you and I,   1
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats   5
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .   10
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

---

[1] Lines from Dante's "Inferno," Canto 27, 61–66, spoken by Guido da Montefeltro, who was condemned to Hell for the sin of false counseling. In explaining his punishment to Dante, Guido is still apprehensive of the judgment of society.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,   15
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,   20
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;   25
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands[2]
That lift and drop a question on your plate;   30
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go   35
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—   40
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
Do I dare   45
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,   50
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
    So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—   55
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?   60
    And how should I presume?

---

[2] An ironic allusion to the poem "Works and Days" by the eighth-century B.C.E. poet Hesiod, which celebrates the virtues of hard labor on the land.

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress   65
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
    And should I then presume?
    And how should I begin?

                    .   .   .   .

    Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets   70
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .

    I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

                    .   .   .   .

    And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!   75
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?   80
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)
    brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;[3]
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and
    snicker,   85
And in short, I was afraid.

    And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,   90
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball[4]
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,[5]
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—   95
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
    Should say: "That is not what I meant at all,
    That is not it, at all."

    And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,   100
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that
    trail along the floor—

And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on
    a screen: 105
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning towards the window, should say:
    "That is not it at all,
    That is not what I meant, at all."   110

                    .   .   .   .

    No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,[6]
Deferential, glad to be of use,   115
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

    I grow old . . . I grow old . . .   120
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.[7]

    Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me.   125
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown   130
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Q. **How would you describe the personality of Eliot's Prufrock?**

Q. **What do each of the literary allusions add to our understanding of the poem?**

The tone of Eliot's poem is established by way of powerfully compressed (and gloomy) images: "one-night cheap hotels," "sawdust restaurants," "soot that falls from chimneys," "narrow streets," and "lonely men in shirt-sleeves." Eliot's literary vignettes, and allusions to biblical prophets and to the heroes of history and art (Hamlet and Michelangelo), work as foils to Prufrock's bankrupt idealism, underlining his self-conscious retreat from action, and his loss of faith in the conventional sources of wisdom. The voices of inspiration, concludes Prufrock, are submerged by all-too-human voices, including his own. Prufrock's moral inertia made him an archetype of the condition of spiritual loss associated with Modernism.

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[3] A reference to John the Baptist, who was beheaded by Herod (Matthew 14: 3–11). Prufrock perceives himself as victim but as neither saint nor martyr.
[4] A reference to the line "Let us roll all our strength and all our sweetness up into one ball," from the poem "To his Coy Mistress" by the seventeenth-century English poet Andrew Marvell, in which Marvell presses his lover to "seize the day."
[5] According to the Gospel of John (11: 1–44), Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave.

[6] A reference to Polonius, the king's advisor in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as well as to Guido da Montefeltro—both of them false counselors.
[7] In Eliot's time, rolled or cuffed trousers were considered fashionable.

Frost and Lyric Poetry

Robert Frost (1874–1963), the best known and one of the most popular of American poets, offered an alternative to the abstract style of the Modernists. While Frost rejected the romantic sentimentality of much nineteenth-century verse, he embraced the older tradition of Western lyric poetry. He wrote in metered verse and jokingly compared the Modernist use of free verse to playing tennis without a net. Frost avoided dense allusions and learned references. In plain speech he expressed deep affection for the natural landscape and an abiding sympathy with the frailties of the human condition. He described American rural life as uncertain and enigmatic—at times, notably dark. "My poems," explained Frost, "are all set to trip the reader head foremost into the boundless." Frost's "The Road Not Taken" is written in the rugged and direct language that became the hallmark of his mature style. The poem exalts a profound individualism as well as a sparseness of expression in line with the Modernist injunction to "make it new."

READING 32.3 Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (1916)

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,   1
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;   5

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,   10

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.   15

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.   20

Q Why might Frost's choice of roads have made "all the difference"?

Q How does the poem illustrate Frost's fondness for direct language?

Early Twentieth-Century Art

As with Modernist poetry, the art of the early twentieth century came to challenge all that preceded it. Liberated by the camera from the necessity of imitating nature, **avant-garde** artists questioned the value of art as a faithful recreation of the visible world. They pioneered an authentic, "stripped down" style that, much like Imagist poetry, *evoked* rather than *described* experience. They pursued the intrinsic qualities and essential meanings of their subject matter to arrive at a concentrated emotional experience. The language of pure form did not, however, rob modern art of its humanistic dimension; rather, it provided artists with a means by which to move beyond traditional ways of representing the visual world. Abstraction—one of the central tenets of Modernism—promised to purify nature so as to come closer to its true reality.

Early Modern artists probed the tools and techniques of formal expression more fully than any artists since the Renaissance. Deliberately blurring the boundaries between painting and sculpture, they attached three-dimensional objects to two-dimensional surfaces, thereby violating traditional categories of style and format. Like the Imagists, they found inspiration in non-Western cultures in which art shared the power of ritual. Innovation, abstraction, and experimentation became the hallmarks of the Modernist revolt against convention and tradition.

Picasso

The giant of twentieth-century art was the Spanish-born Pablo Picasso (1881–1973). During his ninety-two-year life, Picasso worked in almost every major art style of the century, some of which he himself inaugurated. He produced thousands of paintings, drawings, sculptures, and prints—a body of work that in its size, inventiveness, and influence is nothing short of phenomenal. As a child, he showed an extraordinary gift for drawing, and by the time he was twenty his precise and lyrical line style rivaled that of Raphael and Ingres. In 1903, the young painter left his native Spain to settle in Paris. There, in the bustling capital of the Western art world, he came under the influence of Impressionist and Postimpressionist painting, taking as his subjects café life, beggars, prostitutes, and circus folk. Much like the Imagists, Picasso worked to refine form and color in the direction of concentrated expression, reducing the colors of his palette first to various shades of blue and then, after 1904, to tones of rose.

By 1906, Picasso began to abandon traditional Western modes of pictorial representation. In that year he started a large painting that would become his foremost assault on tradition: *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (see Figure 32.2). *Les Demoiselles* depicts five nude women—the prostitutes of a Barcelona bordello in the Carrer d'Avino (Avignon Street). The subject matter of the work looked back to the long, respectable Western tradition of representing the female nude or group of nudes in a landscape setting (see Figure 32.3). However, *Les Demoiselles* violated every shred of tradition.

The manner in which Picasso "made new" a traditional subject in Western art is worth examining: in the early sketches for the painting, originally called *The Philosophical Brothel*, Picasso included two male figures, one of whom resembled the artist himself. However, in 1906, Picasso came under the influence of a number of important exhibitions: a show of archaic Iberian sculptures at the Louvre,

Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (Figure **32.2**) reflects the artist's keen attention to the art of his time, publically displayed in the salons and museums of Paris. In Cézanne's canvases, with their flattened planes and arbitrary colors (Figure **32.3**), Picasso recognized a rigorous new language of form that seemed to define nature's underlying structure. And in African and Oceanic sculpture he discovered the power of art as the palpable embodiment of potent supernatural forces. Of the tribal masks and sculptures (Figure **32.4**), Picasso later explained: "For me, [they] were not just sculptures; they were magical objects . . . intercessors against unknown, threatening spirits." The union of expressive abstraction and dynamic distortion clearly characterizes both the Etoumbi image and the treatment of the two figures on the right in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*.

Figure 32.2 PABLO PICASSO, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 8 ft. × 7 ft. 8 in.
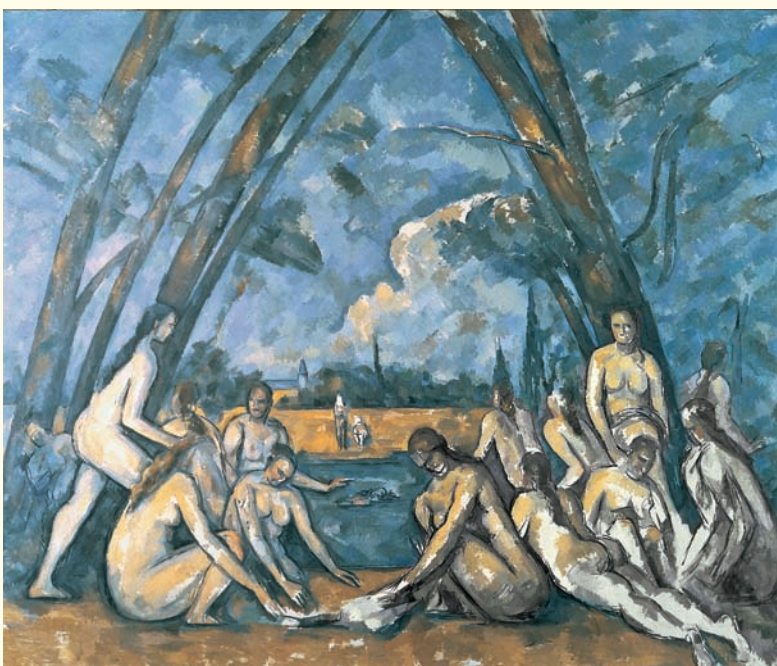
Figure 32.3 PAUL CÉZANNE, *The Large Bathers*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 6 ft. 10⅞ in. × 8 ft. 2¾ in. Picasso came to call this artist "the father of us all."

Figure 32.4 Mask from Etoumbi region, Democratic Republic of Congo. Wood, height 14 in. Scholars continue to debate exactly which works of tribal art Picasso viewed on his visits to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris and which he encountered as African imports sold by Paris art dealers. The latter were purchased by artists (including Picasso himself) and collectors, such as Picasso's expatriate American friends Gertrude Stein and her brother, who resided in Paris.

an exhibition of Gauguin's Polynesian paintings and sculptures at the Salon d'Automne, and, the following year, a huge retrospective of Cézanne's major works. Finally, in the summer of 1907, Picasso fell deeply under the spell of African and Oceanic art on display both in local galleries and at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris.

Reworking *The Philosophical Brothel*, Picasso eliminated the male figures and transformed the five prostitutes into a group of fierce iconic females, forbidding rather than seductive. For what he would later call his "first exorcism picture," he painted out the faces of the figures, giving the two on the right the features of African masks. He seems to have taken apart and reassembled the figures as if to test the physics of disjunction and discontinuity. At least three of the nudes are rendered not from a single vantage point but from multiple viewpoints, as if one's eye could travel freely in time and space. The body of the crouching female on the far right is seen from the back, while her face, savagely striated like the scarified surfaces of African and Polynesian sculptures (see Figures 18.10, 31.27, and 32.4), is seen from the front. The noses of the two central females appear in profile, while their eyes are frontal—a convention Picasso may have borrowed from ancient Egyptian frescoes (see Figure 2.17). The relationship between the figures and the shallow area they occupy is equally disjunctive: background becomes indistinguishable from foreground, and pictorial space is shattered by brutally fractured planes—brick reds and vivid blues—that resemble shards of glass. Stripping his "demoiselles" of all sensuous appeal, Picasso banished the alluring female nude from the domain of Western art.

The Birth of Cubism

Les Demoiselles was the precursor of an audacious new style known as *Cubism,* a bold and distinctive formal language that came to challenge the principles of Renaissance painting as dramatically as Einstein's theory of relativity had challenged Newtonian physics. In the Cubist canvas, the recognizable world of the senses disappears beneath a scaffold of semitransparent planes and short, angular lines; ordinary objects are made to look as if they have exploded and been reassembled somewhat arbitrarily in

geometric bits and pieces that rest on the surface of the picture plane (see Figure **32.1**). A comparison of this early Cubist painting with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (see Figure 32.2) shows how far toward abstraction Picasso had moved in less than four years.

With *Analytic Cubism,* as the style came to be called, a multiplicity of viewpoints replaced one-point perspective. The Cubist image, conceived as if one were moving around, above, and below the subject and even perceiving it from within, appropriates the fourth dimension—time itself. Abrupt shifts in direction and an ambiguous spatial field call up the uncertainties of the new physics. As Picasso and his French colleague Georges Braque (1882–1963) collaborated in a search for an ever more pared-down language of form, their compositions became increasingly abstract and colors became cool and controlled: Cubism came to offer a new formal language, one wholly unconcerned with narrative content. Years later, Picasso defended the viability of this new language: "The fact that for a long time Cubism has not been understood . . . means nothing. I do not read English, an English book is a blank book to me. This does not mean that the English language does not exist."

Around 1912, a second phase of Cubism, namely *Synthetic Cubism,* emerged, when Braque first included three pieces of wallpaper in a still-life composition. Picasso and Braque, who thought of themselves as space pioneers (much like the Wright brothers), pasted mundane objects such as wine-bottle labels, playing cards, and scraps of newspaper onto the surface of the canvas—a technique known as **collage** (from the French *coller,* "to paste"). The result was a kind of art that was neither a painting nor a sculpture, but both at the same time. The two artists filled their canvases with puns, hidden messages, and subtle
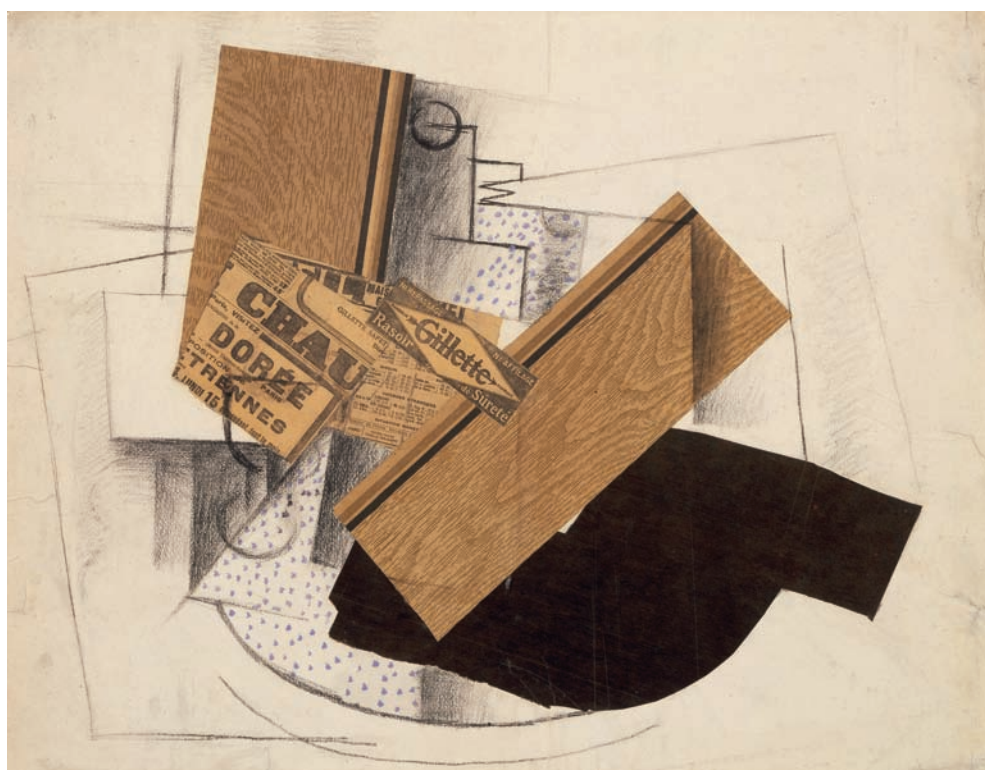
Figure 32.5 GEORGES BRAQUE, *Still Life on a Table*, ca. 1914. Collage on paper, 18⅞ × 24⅜ in. Trained as a decorator, Braque introduced stenciled letters, sand, and sawdust into his artworks. His use of newspaper clippings, wallpaper, wine-bottle labels, and wrappers gave his works greater density and challenged viewers to view everyday objects from different perspectives—conceptual and perceptual.

references to contemporary events; but the prevailing strategy in all these artworks was to test the notion of art as illusion.

In Braque's *Still Life on a Table* (Figure **32.5**), strips of imitation wood graining, a razor-blade wrapper, and newspaper clippings serve the double function of "presenting" and "representing." Words and images wrenched out of context here play off one another like some cryptographic billboard. Prophetic of twentieth-century art in general, Braque would proclaim: "The subject is not the object of the painting, but a new unity, the lyricism that results from method."

Assemblage

In these years, Picasso also created the first **assemblages**— artworks that were built up, or pieced together, from miscellaneous or commonplace materials. Like the collage, the three-dimensional assemblage depended on the inventive combination of found objects and materials. As such, it constituted a radical alternative to traditional techniques of carving in stone, metal casting, and modeling in clay or plaster. The art of assemblage clearly drew inspiration from African and Oceanic traditions of combining natural materials (such as cowrie shells, beads, and raffia) for masks and costumes; it also took heed of the expressive simplifications that typify power objects, reliquaries, and other tribal artforms. Picasso's *Guitar* of 1912–1913 achieves its powerful effect by means of fragmented planes, deliberate spatial inversions (note the projecting soundhole), and the wedding of sheet metal and wire (Figure **32.6**).

Within a decade, Western sculptors were employing the strategies of Synthetic Cubism in ways that reflected abstract models of time and space. The Russian-born cubist Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964), for instance, fashioned the female form so that an area of negative space actually constitutes the head (Figure **32.7**).

Figure 32.7 **ALEXANDER ARCHIPENKO**, *Woman Combing Her Hair*, 1915. Bronze, 13¾ × 3¼ × 3⅛ in. (including base).
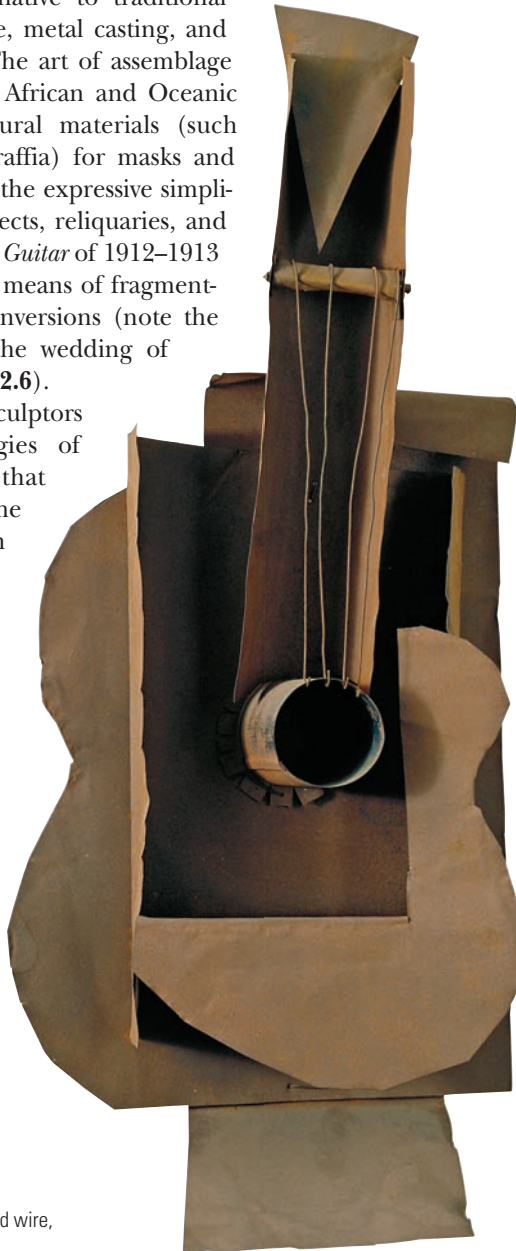
Figure 32.6 **PABLO PICASSO**, *Guitar*, 1912–1913. Construction of sheet metal and wire, 30½ × 13¾ × 7⅝ in.

Futurism

Intrigued by the dynamism of modern technology, the avant-garde movement known as *Futurism* emerged in Italy. Originally a literary movement, it soon came to embrace all the arts, including architecture, poetry, music, and film. Its founder, the poet and iconoclast Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944), issued a series of manifestoes attacking literary formalism, museum art, and academic culture. He called for a style that linked contemporary expression to industry, technology, and urban life. Marinetti, who held that "war was the only healthgiver of the world," demanded an art of "burning violence" that would free Italy from its "fetid gangrene of professors, archeologists, antiquarians, and rhetoricians." "We declare," he wrote in his *Futurist Manifesto* of 1909, "that there can be no modern painting except from the starting point of an absolutely modern sensation. . . . A roaring motorcar is more beautiful than the winged *Victory of Samothrace*" (the famous Hellenistic sculpture illustrated as Figure 5.33). "The gesture that we would reproduce on canvas shall no longer be a fixed moment in universal dynamism. It shall simply be the dynamic sensation itself."

The Futuristic alternative to static academicism was produced by Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916). His near life-sized bronze sculpture captures the sensation of motion as it pushes forward like an automated robot (Figure **32.8**). The striding figure, which consists of an aggressive series of dynamic, jagged lines, is clearly human in form, despite Boccioni's assertion (in his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture*, 1912) that artists should "abolish . . . the traditionally exalted place of subject matter."

The Futurists were enthralled by the speed and dynamism of automobiles, trains, and airplanes, and by such new forms of technology as the machine gun and the electric Brunt Arc lamps that were installed in the streets of Rome during the first decade of the century. One Futurist whimsically claimed that by outshining moonlight, the electric light hailed the demise of Romantic art in the West. In literature, the Futurists shared with the Imagists a desire to "free the word" from traditional meter and syntax. And in music, Futurist composers introduced noise generators and the sounds of airplane propellers and industrial machinery.

Figure 32.8 UMBERTO BOCCIONI,
Unique Forms of Continuity in Space,
1913. Bronze (cast 1931), 3 ft. 7⅞ in.
× 2 ft. 10⅞ in. × 1 ft. 3¾ in.

Figure 32.9 **MARCEL DUCHAMP**, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 4 ft. 10 in. × 2 ft. 11 in. Movement is suggested by the successive superimposition of figures, a technique that mimics the motion of a stroboscope, a device invented in 1832.

Futurists were also inspired by the time-lapse photography of Eadweard Muybridge (see Figure 31.9), the magical properties of X-rays (not in wide use until 1910), and pioneer efforts in the new industry of motion pictures, in which "multiple profiles" gave the appearance of movement in time and space. These modern phenomena shaped the early career of the French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). When Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (Figure **32.9**) was exhibited at the International Exhibition of Modern Art (known as the Armory Show) in New York City, one critic mockingly called it "an explosion in a shingle factory." Yet, from the time of its first showing in 1913, the painting (and much of the art in the Armory exhibition) had a formative influence on the rise of American Modernism. Futurism did not last beyond the end of World War I, but its impact was felt in both the United States and Russia, where Futurist efforts to capture the sense of form in motion would coincide with the first developments in the technology of cinematography.

The Birth of Motion Pictures

It is no coincidence that the art of motion pictures was born at a time when artists and scientists were obsessed with matters of space and time. Indeed, as an artform that captures rapidly changing experience, cinema is the quintessentially modern medium. The earliest public film presentations took place in Europe and the United States in the mid-1890s: in 1895, Thomas Edison (1847–1931) was the first American to project moving images onto a screen. In France the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière (1862–1954; 1864–1948) perfected the process by which cellulose film ran smoothly in a commercial projector. They pioneered the first cinematic projection in an auditorium equipped with seats and piano accompaniment. These first experiments delighted audiences with moving pictures of everyday subjects.

It was not until 1902, however, that film was used to create a reality all its own: in that year the French filmmaker Georges Méliès (1861–1938) completed a fourteen-minute theatrical sequence called *A Trip to the Moon*, an engaging fantasy based on a novel by Jules Verne. One year later, the American director Edwin S. Porter (1869–1941) produced the twelve-minute silent film *The Great Train Robbery*, which treated the myth of American frontier life in its story of a sensational holdup, followed by the pursuit and capture of the bandits. These pioneer narrative films established the idiom for two of the most popular genres in cinematic history: the science-fiction film and the "western."

Between 1908 and 1912, Hollywood became the center of American cinema. D. W. Griffith (1875–1948), the leading director of his time, made major innovations in cinematic technique. He introduced the use of multiple cameras and camera angles, as well as such new techniques as close-ups, fade-outs, and flashbacks, which, when joined together in an edited sequence, greatly expanded the potential of film narrative. Griffith's three-hour silent film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) was an epic account of the American Civil War and the Reconstruction Era that followed in the South. Unfortunately, despite the film's technical excellence, its negative portrayal of African-Americans contributed to stereotyping them as violent and ignorant savages.

Until the late 1920s, all movies were silent—filmmakers used captions to designate the spoken word wherever appropriate, and live musical accompaniment was often provided in the theater. Well before the era of the "talkies," cinematographers began to use the camera not simply as a disinterested observer, but as a medium for conveying the emotional states of the characters. In the absence of sound, they were forced to develop the affective structure of the film by essentially visual means. According to some film critics, the aesthetics of film as a medium were compromised when sound was added. Nevertheless, by 1925 it was apparent that film was destined to become one of the major artforms of the modern era.

Matisse and Fauvism

While Cubists and Futurists were principally concerned with matters of space and motion, other Modernists, led by the French artist Henri Matisse (1869–1954), made *color* the principal feature of their canvases. This group, branded as "Fauves" (from the French *fauve*, "wild beast") by a critic who saw their work at an exhibition in Paris in 1905, employed flat, bright colors in the arbitrary manner of Van Gogh and Gauguin. But whereas the latter had used color to evoke a mood or a symbolic image, the younger artists were concerned with color only as it served pictorial structure; their style featured bold spontaneity and the direct and instinctive application of pigment. Critics who called these artists "wild beasts" were in fact responding to the use of color in ways that seemed both crude and savage. They attacked the new style as "color madness" and "the sport of a child." For Matisse, however, color was the font of pure and sensuous pleasure. In his portrait of Madame Matisse (which he subtitled *The Green Line*), broad, flat swaths of paint give definition to a visage that is bisected vertically by an acid-green stripe (Figure **32.10**).

Matisse brought daring to Cézanne's flat color patches, using them to simplify form that achieved the visual impact of the tribal artworks he collected. At the same time, he invested the canvas with a thrilling color radiance, that, like smell (as Matisse himself observed), subtly but intensely suffuses the senses. In contrast with Picasso, who held that art was a weapon with which to jar the senses, Matisse sought "an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter . . . something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue."

Matisse was among the first to articulate the Modernist scorn for representational art: "Exactitude is not truth," he insisted. In *Notes of a Painter*, published in 1908, he described colors and shapes as the equivalent of feelings
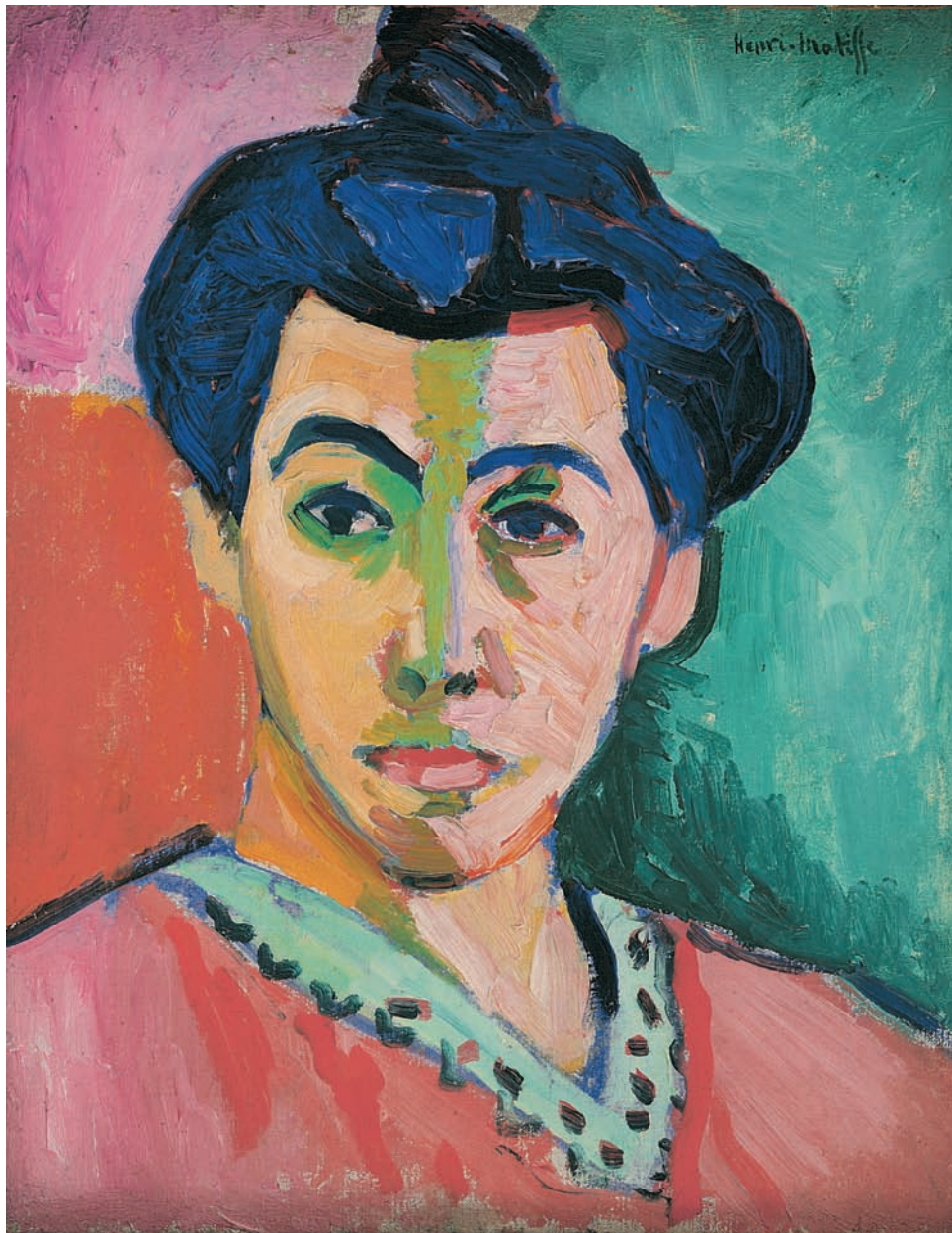

Figure 32.10 HENRI MATISSE, *Madame Matisse (The Green Line)*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 16 × 12¾ in.

Figure 32.11 HENRI MATISSE, *Dance 1,* 1909. Oil on canvas, 8 ft. 6½ in. × 12 ft. 9½ in. Matisse painted a second version of *The Dance* for the home of his patron, the Russian art collector Sergei Shchukin. It is now in Saint Petersburg's Hermitage Museum.

rather than the counterpart of forms in nature. Gradually, as he came to be influenced by Islamic miniatures and Russian icons, his style moved in the direction of linear simplicity and sensuousness of color. A quintessential example of his facility for color abstraction is *Dance I* (Figure **32.11**). In its lyrical arabesques and unmodeled fields of color, the painting calls to mind the figural grace of ancient Greek vase paintings. At the same time, it captures the exhilaration of the primordial round—the traditional dance of almost all Mediterranean cultures.

Brancusi and Abstraction

Although Cubists, Futurists, and Fauves pursued their individual directions, they all shared the credo of abstract art: the artist must evoke the essential and intrinsic qualities of the subject rather than describe its physical properties. In early modern sculpture, the guardian of this credo was Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957). Born in Romania and trained in Bucharest, Vienna, and Munich, Brancusi came to Paris in 1904. There, after a brief stay in Rodin's studio, he fell under the spell of ancient fertility figures and the sculpture of Africa and Polynesia. Inspired by these

objects, whose spiritual power lay in their visual immediacy and their truth to materials, Brancusi proceeded to create an art of radically simple, organic forms. While he began by closely observing the living object—whether human or animal—he progressively eliminated all naturalistic details until he arrived at a form that captured the essence of the subject. Like his good friend Ezra Pound, Brancusi achieved a concentrated expression in forms so elemental that they seem to speak a universal language.

A case in point is *Bird in Space* (Figure **32.12**), of which Brancusi made more than thirty versions in various sizes and materials. The sculpture is of no particular species of feathered creature, but it captures perfectly the concept of "birdness." It is, as Brancusi explained, "the essence of flight." "What is real," he insisted, "is not the external form, but the essence of things." The elegant form, curved like a feather, unites birdlike qualities of grace and poise with the dynamic sense of soaring levitation characteristic of mechanical flying machines, such as rockets and airplanes. Indeed, when Brancusi's bronze *Bird* first arrived in America, United States customs officials mistook it for a piece of industrial machinery.

Figure 32.13 EDWARD WESTON, *Two Shells*, 1927. Photograph. Print by Cole Weston, 9¼ × 7¼ in.

Abstraction and Photography

Photographers also enthusiastically embraced the Modernist aesthetic. The American photographer Edward Weston (1886–1953) was among the pioneers of photographic abstraction. His close-up photograph of two nautilus shells evokes the twin ideas of flower (a magnolia blossom, according to Weston himself) and female (Figure **32.13**). Weston took photography beyond the realm of the representational: he used the camera not simply to record the natural world, but to explore new avenues of visual experience.

Nonobjective Art

Between 1909 and 1914, three artists working independently of one another in different parts of Europe moved to purge art of all recognizable subject matter. The Russians Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and Kasimir Malevich (1878–1935) and the Dutchman Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), pioneers of **Nonobjective Art**, had all come into contact with the principal art movements of the early twentieth century: Cubism, Futurism,

Figure 32.12 CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI, *Bird in Space*, 1928. Polished bronze, height 4 ft. 6 in.

and Fauvism. They acknowledged the Postimpressionist premise that a painting was, first and foremost, a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a particular order. But their quest for subjectless form had a unique goal: that of achieving an art whose purity would offer a spiritual remedy for the soullessness of modern life.

Kandinsky Kandinsky, whose career in art began only at the age of forty, was deeply influenced by the Fauves, the Symbolists (see chapter 31), and by Russian folk art. While he filled his early paintings with vibrant hues, he observed with some dismay that the subject matter in his canvases tended to "dissolve" into his colors. One evening, upon returning to his studio in Munich, Kandinsky experienced a "revelation" that led him to abandon pictorial subject matter. The incident is described in his *Reminiscences* of 1913:

> I saw an indescribably beautiful
> picture drenched with an inner
> glowing. At first I hesitated, then
> I rushed toward this mysterious
> picture, of which I saw nothing but
> forms and colors, and whose content
> was incomprehensible. Immediately
> I found the key to the puzzle: it was a
> picture I had painted, leaning against
> the wall, standing on its side. . . . Now
> I knew for certain that the [pictorial]
> object harmed my paintings.

From this point on, Kandinsky began to assemble colors, lines, and shapes without regard for recognizable objects (Figure **32.14**). He called his nonrepresentational paintings "improvisations" or "abstract compositions" and numbered them in series. In his treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910), he argued that form and color generate meaning without reference to the natural world. "Color can exercise enormous influence upon the body," he wrote; it functions to influence mood. Such insights anticipated modern research in chromotherapy, that is, the use of colors and colored light to affect body states. According to Kandinsky, painting was a spiritually liberating force akin to music—he himself was an amateur cellist and friend of many avant-garde composers. "Painting," he proclaimed, "is a thundering collision of different worlds, intended to create a new world."
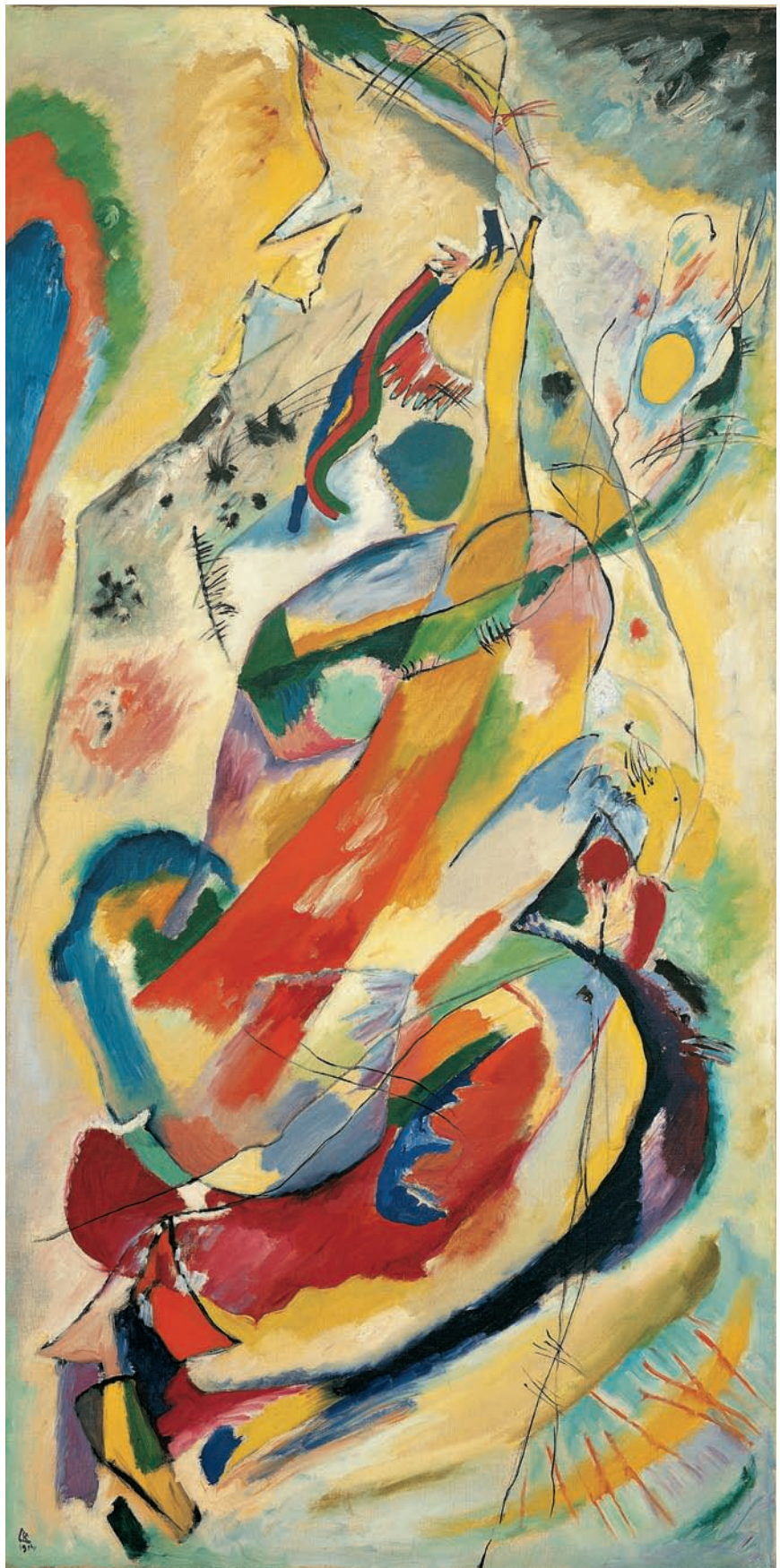

Figure 32.14 WASSILY KANDINSKY, *Panel for Edwin Campbell No. 1*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 5 ft. 4 in. × 3 ft. ¼ in. Kandinsky was among the first of the Modernists to confess indebtedness to atomic theory. He urged young artists to study the new physics.
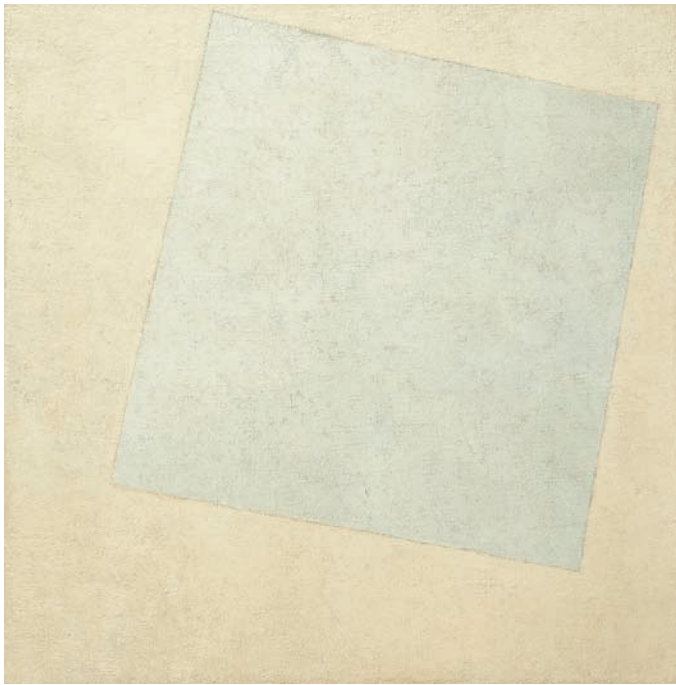
Figure 32.15 KASIMIR MALEVICH, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 31¼ × 31¼ in.

Malevich Kandinsky's Russian contemporary Kasimir Malevich arrived at nonrepresentational art not by way of Fauvism but through the influence of Analytic Cubism, which asserted the value of line over color. Seeking to "free art from the burden of the object" and to rediscover "pure feeling in creative art," Malevich created an austere style limited to the strict geometry of the square, the circle, and the rectangle (Figure **32.15**). Malevich called these shapes "suprematist elements" and his style *Suprematism.* "To the suprematist," wrote Malevich, "the visual phenomena of the objective world are, in themselves, meaningless; the significant thing is feeling . . . quite apart from the environment in which it is called forth." By restricting his art to the arrangement of ideal geometric shapes on the two-dimensional picture plane, Malevich replaced the world of appearance with a language of form as abstract and exacting as that of modern physics.

Mondrian The early works of the third pioneer of Nonobjective Art, Piet Mondrian, reveal his affection for the landscape of his native Holland. By 1910, however, as he began to impose an abstract, geometric regularity on the natural environment, he slowly stripped away recognizable subject matter (Figure **32.16**). Eventually, he limited his visual vocabulary to "pure" forms: the square or rectangle laid out on a grid of horizontal and vertical lines, the three primary colors (red, yellow, and blue), and three values—white, gray, and black (Figure **32.17**). The paring-down process achieved a compositional balance of geometric elements, an "equivalence of opposites" similar to the dynamic equilibrium of an algebraic equation.

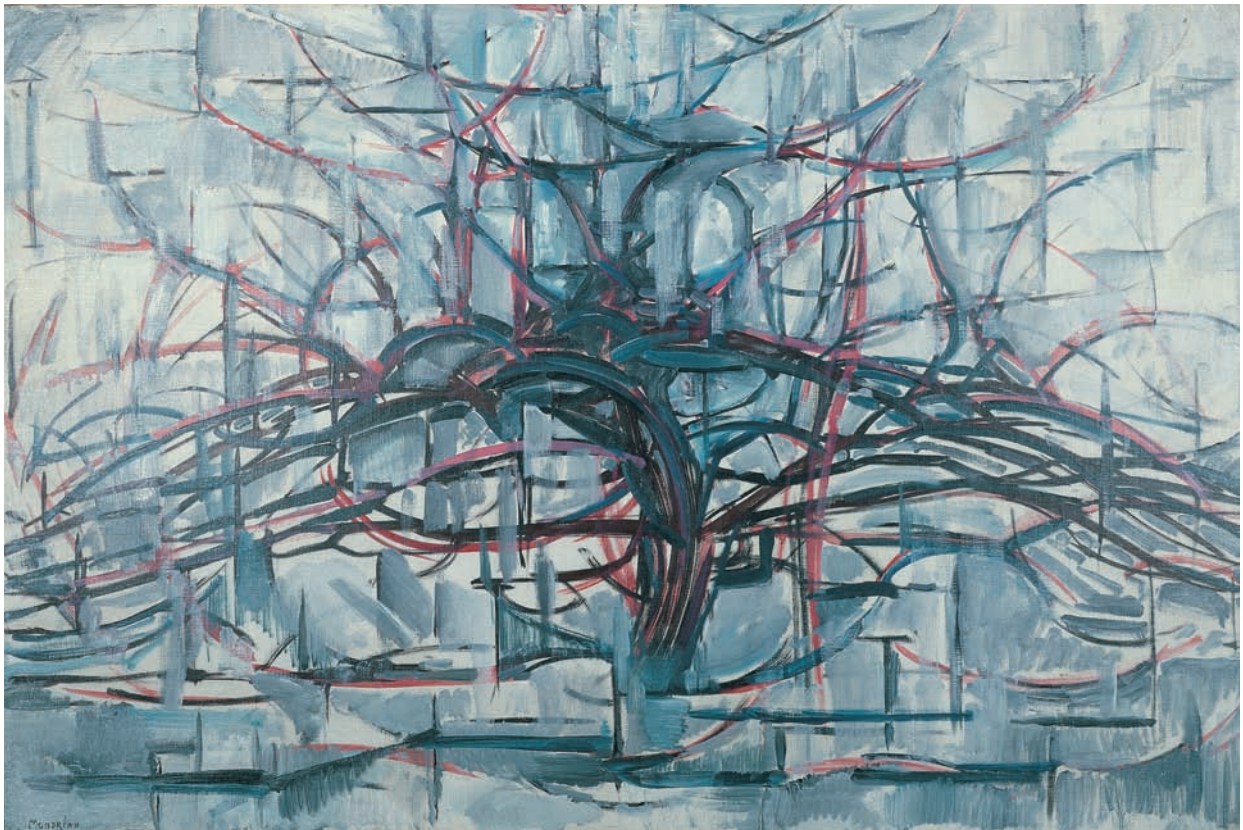Although Mondrian would eventually emigrate to America, the movement he helped to create would

Figure 32.16 PIET MONDRIAN, *Tree*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 29¼ × 43⅞ in. In this early study of a tree, the transition from a realistic depiction to abstract design is evident. Mondrian finally stripped away all representational associations to arrive at his signature grid patterns. © 2014 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International, USA.

Figure 32.17 PIET MONDRIAN, *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray, and Blue*, 1921. Oil on canvas, 23⅜ × 23⅜ in. © 2014 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International, USA.

continue to flourish. Taking its name from a magazine founded in 1917, it was called simply *De Stijl* ("the Style"). Its Dutch adherents advanced a radical utopian program devoted to the evolution of pure, abstract art: "a direct expression of the universal." Despite differences of opinion among its members—Mondrian resigned in 1925 in opposition to a colleague's use of diagonals—De Stijl was to have worldwide impact, especially on architecture and furniture design (Figure **32.18**).

The disappearance of the object in early twentieth-century art is often mistakenly associated with the dehumanization of modern life. However, one of the great ironies of the birth of Nonobjective Art is its indebtedness to the mystical and transcendental philosophies that were current in the early modern era. One of the most influential of these was *theosophy*, a blend of Eastern and Western religions that emphasizes communion with nature by purely spiritual means. Mondrian, a member of the Dutch Theosophical Society, regarded geometric clarity as an expression of spiritual progress. In his view, the law of equivalence reflected "the true content of reality." "Not only science," wrote Mondrian, "but art also, shows us that reality, at first incomprehensible, gradually reveals itself by the mutual relations that are inherent in things. Pure science and pure art, disinterested and free, can lead the advance in the recognition of the laws which are based on these relationships." The commitment to pure abstraction as the universal language of spirituality—a commitment central to the careers of Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian—reflects the utopian humanism of Modernists who perceived their art as a wellspring of social harmony and order.

Russian Constructivism

While utopian Modernism swept across Europe, one of the most utilitarian of the movements for "pure art" flourished in pre-revolutionary Russia. *Constructivism*, which had its roots in both Futurism and the purist teachings of Malevich, advocated the application of geometric abstraction to all forms of social enterprise. Russian Constructivists, who called themselves "artist–engineers,"

Figure 32.18 GERRIT RIETVELD, *Red Blue Chair*, 1923. Painted wood, 34⅛ × 26 × 33 in; seat height 13 in.